

**Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission
Turners Falls, Massachusetts
Meeting Minutes
January 26, 2004**

Agenda Items

1. Call to Order, Determination of Quorum, Approval of Today's Agenda & Minutes of the Last Meeting

Chair Ed Parker called the meeting to order at 10:25 a.m.

Mr. Parker introduced and welcomed Mr. Marvin Moriarty, the new USFWS Regional Director - recently relocated from Minnesota. Mr. Moriarty is a Vermont native.

It was noted that a quorum was present. The agenda was accepted.

Mr. Tom Menard moved to accept the Minutes from the November 18, 2003 meeting. Mr. Eric Palmer seconded the motion and the Minutes were approved. Mr. Bob Jones moved to accept the Minutes from the December 8, 2003 conference call. Mr. Rick Bennett seconded the motion and the Minutes were approved.

2. Report of the Executive Assistant

Ms. Janice Rowan provided a report on Commission activities:

The Connecticut River Atlantic Salmon Commission convened an ad hoc meeting of Technical Committee members on December 3, 2003 to review the draft funding recommendations presented at the November 18, 2003 Commission meeting. The committee met, reviewed core-funding recommendations, and developed two options for the remainder of the funds. These recommendations precluded continued operation of the Whittemore Salmon Station. The committee also made recommendations about the disposition of the adult Atlantic salmon held at the Whittemore facility.

The Commission met in executive session via a telephone conference call on December 8, 2003. This session was necessary because closure of the Whittemore facility included personnel concerns and required an expedited vote by the Commissioners.

The Commission voted to use the new funds to continue current efforts to maintain the anadromous fisheries restoration program including: (1) transfer of adult American shad from the Holyoke dam in Massachusetts to the mid-Connecticut River basin in New Hampshire and Vermont to address poor fish passage results at the Turners Falls dam in Massachusetts; (2) transfer of adult blueback herring from the Chicopee River in Massachusetts to vacant habitat in the Westfield River in Massachusetts and Ashuelot River in New Hampshire to address restoration of historic runs; and, (3) management and marking of genetic brood stock and progeny to evaluate hatchery-released salmon and habitat. The funds will also be used for

production and release of Atlantic salmon juveniles in all four-basin states, and to improve adult salmon handling and egg incubation capacity at other facilities, due to the closure of the Whittemore Salmon Station. New funding will also permit increased effort to remove barriers to fish passage as well as improved communications on Commission activities via the Internet. A funding table is attached.

The Whittemore facility was closed in 2003 and will remain so until such time that adult Atlantic salmon returns and program needs warrant otherwise. The genetic egg bank has been transferred to the White River National Fish Hatchery. The salmon held at the Whittemore facility have been transferred to the North Attleboro National Fish Hatchery and the Richard Cronin National Salmon Station. Basin legislators were notified of the Commission decisions regarding funding, closure of the Connecticut facility, and disposition of salmon held at this facility.

The Commission provided a news release to news media outlets throughout the basin on December 22, 2003. The news release and a copy of one of the news stories are attached.

The Administrative Report, a summary of CRASC finances and correspondence, is attached along with a copy of the annual report to the Governors.

3. Report of the Technical Committee Chair

Mr. Jay McMenemy provided a summary of the activities of the Technical Committee:

Stocking/Spawning/Egg Production/Egg Incubation

The egg take for 2003 was about 12.5 million, almost two million more than originally projected but still short of our 15 million goal. White River NFH should be able to care for the increased number of eggs because of the funding of temporary staff by the Forest Service, the USFWS Ecoteam, and the new CRASC funding along with assistance from partners. Numbers of fry stocked this spring will probably be slightly more than last year's reduced level (7 million). A table detailing egg production is attached.

The kelts and domestics at Whittemore Salmon Station were transferred to North Attleboro NFH and Cronin NSS because of the closure of Whittemore.

Although White River NFH has seasonal help for egg incubation, they continue to be short-staffed due to assistant manager and biologist vacancies. All federal facilities have inadequate operating funds and initial indications are that this year's budget situation is bleak.

Upstream Passage

Northeast Utilities will be submitting draft plans for the improvement of fish passage at Turners Falls to the shad and fish passage workgroups soon. This will address the long standing issue of poor shad passage at the Turners Falls fishways.

Vermont Yankee

Entergy, the new owner of the Vermont Yankee Nuclear Plant, has proposed an additional increase in their thermal discharge limits. In combination with their earlier proposal, this would increase temperatures throughout the year. We are very concerned about the possible impacts of existing and proposed increased thermal discharges on anadromous fish migrations. Agency staff continues to review their proposals.

4. Update and Discussion on CRASC Congressional Initiative

Mr. Duncan McInnes provided the following update on the CRASC Congressional Initiative:

The ad hoc Congressional Initiative Committee has met and plans to use an advocacy strategy similar to last year. Mr. McInnes reported that the legislators know CRASC and the ad hoc Committee members now. The ad hoc Committee will visit legislators in DC during the month of March with subsequent follow-up visits locally. He requested guidance from the Commission on (1) the CRASC message; (2) the CRASC funding recommendation and priorities for 2005; and, (3) CRASC support for USFWS and vice versa since the USFWS is also making visits to legislators in DC at about the same time.

Mr. Parker agreed that the Committee needed this guidance and asked for a timeline detailing when Congress and the President submit their budgets. Moreover since the Commission expects to repeat this process annually, Mr. Parker also requested that the ad hoc Committee document the game plan with a list of the key contacts so that it can be implemented into the future regardless of the current staffing. Mr. Eric Palmer offered the assistance of the Technical Committee Chair, Jay McMenemy, to the ad hoc Committee and made him available for visits to DC. The Commission gladly accepted.

Mr. McInnes asked what the USFWS message and priorities would be this year since the Commission does not want to carry a message that conflicts with that from the USFWS. Mr. Pajak replied that the USFWS is spending half its budget on salmon but that the Connecticut and Merrimack programs were ranked lowest in the Region. Mr. Bennett said that the Service was not going to rank the programs in DC because this is a partnership effort. He added that the program ties in with the national and regional priorities. The problem is that there is not enough money to address all of the priorities. The challenge is to hold it all together and move forward given these constraints. Mr. Bennett offered the USFWS timeline and objective of the USFWS DC visits: Field station Project Leaders will be providing informational briefings to legislators on a station by station-state by state basis (rather than by individual programs) from March 8-12, 2004. They will present information on the new USFWS Fisheries Strategic Plan. There will be a National *Scaling Up* to launch the Strategic Plan and advocate for the USFWS Fisheries Program in DC during the last week of March 2004. This effort will target key legislators and Committee staff.

Mr. Parker pointed out that some aspects of the process were less than ideal last year, placing the Executive Assistant in a bad position. He requested clarification from the USFWS on its position toward this initiative so the Commission can plan ahead for the coming DC visits.

Mr. Bennett acknowledged that there had been some confusion last year about meetings with Committee staff and Committee members. This year, he said that USFWS staff can meet with local delegates but is not permitted to meet with Committee staff and Committee members. In the case of the Commission's Executive Assistant it is important to clarify roles at the outset of any meetings to avoid the perception that a USFWS employee is lobbying. Thus Ms. Rowan may continue in her role meeting with basin delegates (Gregg, Olver, Leahy...), as in past years, but may not participate in actual meetings with Committee staff. Scheduling of meetings can begin as long as the ad hoc Committee provides the Commission enough time to fully outline the message and priorities.

Mr. McInnes indicated that he is seeking legal opinion from the State Attorney General on his status in these visits. Mr. Jones agreed that the Connecticut River Salmon Association also wanted to be careful about the perception of lobbying. Mr. Parker suggested that the ad hoc Committee hand out a Commission fact sheet that describes the Commission and identifies participants, etc. to address these concerns.

Mr. Bennett further recognized that the Commission will be identifying Commission needs and indicated that the Commission could provide information on USFWS funding needs as part of that effort.

Mr. McInnes said that the ad hoc Committee emphasized the Commission Program recommendation last year but highlighted individual state benefits, as appropriate. This year, the fact that the State of Connecticut closed the Whittemore Salmon Station proves that the Commission message was on target. Mr. Parker said that it can also demonstrate that the Commission is in this for the good of the whole program and that it has the fortitude to protect the long-term interests of the program through implementation of operational efficiencies for cost effectiveness.

Mr. Pajak wanted to know what the state priorities were and if the States wanted the USFWS to partner on any new initiatives, if they were not CRASC or the Connecticut River. Mr. Tisa said that all the programs that State of Massachusetts was working on were priorities but that he would welcome the opportunity to share what the State is doing. Mr. McInnes said that the State of New Hampshire is committed to this partnership and this program as a priority. The individual priorities within and among the States may differ from those of the USFWS, but that makes sense because the agency missions are different. Those differences should not be interpreted to exclude or negate this program's value and importance. He added that the NHFG is about to embark on an evaluation of State priorities, a process that occurs about every five years.

Mr. Moriarty provided some context for Mr. Pajak's query about State priorities. He pointed out that the OMB is asking the USFWS to be more strategic. They are asking questions like how the CRASC and USFWS programs mesh with state programs and priorities? As an example, the OMB is looking at State goals identified in new State Wildlife Conservation Plans within the Federal Aid Program. He indicated that this was something with which the States should be very engaged.

Schedule and Deadlines:

Mr. Parker set the following schedule for feedback from Commission members on the following:

- (1) the CRASC message for the Congressional visits this year;
 - (2) the CRASC funding recommendation and priorities for 2005
- Submit your input by email to Jan_Rowan@fws.gov by February 3, 2004

This information will be summarized into a draft CRASC message with funding recommendations and priorities at the February 4, 2004 meeting of the ad hoc Committee (with members of the Technical Committee). The meeting is scheduled for 10:00 am at the Coordinator's Office. The draft will be finalized for Commission review on February 11, 2004.

The Commission will discuss the draft CRASC message with funding recommendations and priorities via telephone conference call.

5. Scientific and Socio-Economic Review

Mr. Bennett initiated a discussion on a program review by saying that the time is right for an independent, critical review. The Commission has demonstrated legislative support for the program while decreasing budgets and declining fish returns are a growing concern. A review may provide needed validation and better define program benefits. The specifics of who conducts the review or how it is completed will be determined by the available funding. The key is that the review is impartial. It's possible that the USGS can provide project management and draw outside academics and others to assist in the effort. The questions and sideboards that the Commission establishes will be key to a successful review. The socio-economic survey is a very important element of the review as the results of the Merrimack brood stock fishery have shown. Mr. Bennett pointed out that the Maine review has validated and propelled that program forward.

Mr. McInnes indicated that the NHFG fully supports an external review of the program, including all the species under restoration. Further, it is important that this effort address both the Merrimack and Connecticut River programs. He expressed concern about substituting additional research for a review since time is of the essence in stabilizing the program. He added that the socio-economic survey is needed, independent of a program review. This type of data is important to the CRASC Congressional Initiative. Legislators are looking for this information and they are looking for the message of diversity in the program. The Commission member agencies ought to be able to find the estimated \$75,000 required for the survey.

Mr. Palmer could see the value of an external review in lending credibility to the program. There could be benefit to drafting a review proposal for consideration. However, he did not see it as a good compass for internal direction. The Commission already has answers to many of the topics cited in the Maine Review but faces unanswered questions that have resulted from unfunded research. Mr. McMenemy pointed out that there are no surprises in the Maine review. He reiterated that the problem is a lack of funding for evaluation and indicated that the money might be used more productively if it used to answer key research questions.

Mr. Jones cautioned that reviews can be a waste of money especially if nothing comes of the effort.

Mr. Menard asked how a review would be funded? Mr. Bennett said that the USFWS can provide some research funding to USGS. Mr. Parker added other sources: State Wildlife Grants, a Congressional add-on, NOAA, reallocation from the USFWS Fisheries budget, reallocation from the State budgets, NFWF, etc. It's possible that the Commission could take a different approach to restoration in the basin and, through those actions, free up funds for this type of effort. Mr. Bennett suggested that the Commission decides first what is desired from the review, and then get an estimate of how to accomplish that goal, and then seek funds.

Mr. Tisa agreed that a review should include both the Merrimack and Connecticut programs. However, he wanted to see a framework for the review, what the key questions would be, before endorsing this action. In terms of research, he saw it as important to answer why we have so few Atlantic salmon returning.

Mr. Parker summarized two concerns of legislators: (1) low Atlantic salmon returns; and, (2) a public that thinks the program is only about Atlantic salmon – a diversity issue. A review will not likely solve either of these concerns but both can be resolved through other means, possibly making an outside review premature.

Mr. Steve Gephard provided an alternative approach to a program review. Instead of a review, the Technical Committee proposed a series of research questions for evaluating the program:

- (1) Which salmon fry and which streams that are stocked are producing the smolts that generate adult salmon returns to the river? Est. Cost: \$100K
- (2) How many salmon smolts are lost in the river prior to reaching Long Island Sound? Est. Cost: \$155K
- (3) How many salmon smolts are lost in the river prior to reaching Long Island Sound? How are salmon adapting to first exposure to saltwater? Est. Cost \$500K
- (4) How many American shad, blueback herring, striped bass, etc. are entering the river? What is the effectiveness of the Holyoke Dam Fishlift? What is the potential impact of striped bass on salmon smolts and blueback herring? Est. Cost: \$270K
- (5) How much money is salmon restoration worth to the people in the Connecticut River basin and the Northeast? How greatly does the public value the prospect of restoring salmon and other diadromous fishes to the basin? Est. Cost: \$75K
- (6) What is the return rate of hatchery-reared salmon smolts and how does it compare to that of fry-stocked salmon? How do vaccinations affect survival rates of hatchery-reared smolts? What pathogens place the smolts and adults at risk? Est. Cost: \$75K

Portions of questions 1 and 5 have been recommended for funding and have been funded in 2004. All were addressed in the initial \$9M CRASC funding recommendation but not recommended in the 2004 recommendation of \$770K because those recommendations focused on critical operational needs.

Mr. Palmer pointed out that these questions do not address the credibility gap created by low returns and public perception that the program is only about salmon. The Commission also needs to demonstrate the answers to these questions. The Ted Williams article in Patagonia shows that there are broader issues.

Mr. Pajak asked what the probability was that the Commission could get the \$1.4M required to answer these questions? He noted that the USFWS-Fisheries Program can't balance its budget this year so the Commission should not assume that base program operations will remain in tact.

Mr. Moriarty said that this is not a lot of money if there is a collaborative effort. NGOs may be willing to help fund pieces and parts of the research. He indicated willingness to talk to NFWF. Mr. McInnes responded that this is a New England-wide issue, that the NEASC could be resurrected to help address these needs. Mr. Carroll asked if there has been a national budget reduction share-shift with West Coast programs receiving more funds - a fact that could provide information to motivate support. Mr. Bennett offered to look into that. Mr. Moriarty encouraged the Commission to continue a sustained effort in Congress.

Mr. Bob Stira proposed a hybrid of the review/research idea. He suggested an outside advisory committee to review the research questions and offer suggestions.

Mr. Moriarty said the review is to see if we are on the right road and the research questions are to keep us driving straight on that road. The concern is timing.

Mr. Parker asked the USFWS to provide copies of the Great Lakes Lake Trout and the Maine Reviews. Mr. Bennett agreed to try to do that.

The Commissioners agreed to take more time on this decision. Mr. Parker requested feedback from the Commissioners on needed research and priorities for research. He also asked for feedback on the priority of a review versus additional research or some hybrid of the two options. Please submit input to Jan.Rowan@fws.gov. A conference call to address this issue will be arranged for a date in early March at the latest.

6. Other Business

It was agreed to continue with the current slate of Commission officers, rather than add a Secretary/Treasurer, since the USFWS would be managing the funds allocated to CRASC.

Draft cooperative agreements are under review for the transfer of funds from the USFWS to the States, USGS and CRASC. Mr. Tisa indicated that the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife had no problem with the agreement. The issue for that agency is hiring – even seasonal hires require approval by the Governor. He inquired whether the USFWS could hire the three-six month seasonals and offered to provide position descriptions, and etc. Ms. Rowan agreed to investigate and implement this option if possible. Mr. McInnes reported that the agreements were still under review in New Hampshire. Mr. Parker indicated that the Connecticut Department of Environmental Protection had recently implemented a new accounting system that is not running smoothly. Long delays in setting up accounts are expected to cause a problem. He inquired whether there were any other options including use of the Federal Aid Program, for transferring the funds. While it appears that the Federal Aid Program cannot be used for this purpose, existing cooperative agreements between the CTDEP and the USFWS may be amended for this purpose. The parties agreed to look into this possibility.

Mr. Carroll provided the Commissioners with copies of the Patagonia Winter Catalog. It contains an environmental essay, *Everything But Salmon*, by Ted Williams. The company provided enough copies for the Commissioners and for use in meetings with legislators. The Connecticut River Salmon Association received permission to print the same article in the Association newsletter. Mr. Carroll agreed to follow up with Patagonia to see if they would make color-reprints of the article available for distribution.

Mr. Carroll reported that staff from Representative Sanders (VT) office had contacted him for the Connecticut River Salmon Association's position on the potential that the State of Vermont might play a role in or actually purchase part of the hydro electric generating facilities on the Deerfield River in Vermont. PG&E, the current owner, is in bankruptcy. Mr. Carroll pointed out that this is an excellent example of the success of the CRASC Congressional Initiative and looked to the Commission and to the Commissioner from Vermont for guidance in responding to the inquiry. Mr. Palmer said that Atlantic salmon issues are covered in the FERC license. That license and all its requirements will transfer to the new owner upon sale of the dam. He cautioned that the bigger danger is the time it takes for the new owner to come up to speed with all of the operational requirements.

Mr. Thoits moved to adjourn the meeting, and Mr. Jones seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 1:57 p.m.

CRASC Meeting Attendance
January 26, 2004

Janice Rowan	USFWS
Ed Parker	CTDEP
Rick Bennett	USFWS
Marvin Moriarty	USFWS
Paul Pajak	USFWS
Thomas D. Menard	MA Public Representative
Mark Tisa	MAFW
Duncan McInnes	NHFG
Charles F. Thoits III	NH Public Representative
Caleb Slater	MAFW
Darleen Cutting	USFWS
Phil Herzig	USFWS
Darren Desmarais	USFWS
Jay McMenemy	VTFW
Eric Palmer	VTFW
Robert Jones	CT Public Representative
Jim Carroll	Connecticut River Salmon Association
Steve Gephard	CTDEP
Gabe Gries	NHFG
Aaron Martin	USFWS Volunteer
Bob Stira	Northeast Generation Services
Ken Gillette	USFWS
Larry Lofton	USFWS
Steve Rideout	USGS